

Kessel: Hell in Space

Planet Hoppers: May 2003

By [Cory Herndon](#)

Welcome to "Planet Hoppers," a new feature on the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* website. Each month, we'll bring you a set of articles on a particular world in the *Star Wars* galaxy that a Gamemaster can use separately or as a linked series of events.

This month, the infamous spice-mining planet that's the source of the galaxy's best-selling contraband -- Kessel. Part 1 is online now, and be sure to check back each week for the next installment!



Part 1: Rotten to the Core

In which a young Wookiee accepts enslavement on Kessel to save his family's lives.

Part 2: In the Land of the Blind

In which young Wookiee slave Gyyllghard gets a dressing-down from prisoner-official Moruth Doole.

Part 3: Hope in Darkness

In which a few bold Wookiees and a group of slave children honor tradition even in the Mines of Kessel.

Part 4: On the Moon

In which Gyyllghard pulls janitorial duty in the administrative wings of the prison.

Part 5: The Warden

In which a young Wookiee slave meets his oppressor and makes a fateful choice.

About the Author

One-time *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* editor Cory J. Herndon is now a freelancer. Cory's work has appeared in *Amazing Stories*, *Duelist*, *TopDeck*, *Star Wars Gamer*, *Dragon*, and SCIFI.com. He has done additional design work on the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* revised core rulebook (primarily the Droids chapter), *The Dark Side Sourcebook* (creatures and archetypes), and the *Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game*. He is also the author of Volumes 5 and 6 of the **Magic: The Gathering Encyclopedia**. Cory's short story "Like Spider's Silk" appears in the *Secrets of Magic* Anthology. He asks that you please purchase a copy of it and the **D&D** novel *The Living Dead* for every room in your home. Cory is currently authoring original content for Xbox.com, writing the third book in an upcoming *Magic: The Gathering* novel trilogy, and continuing to design *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* material for the Wizards website.

Part 1: Rotten to the Core

Catalogued by Archivist Cory Herndon

ARCHIVIST'S NOTE: The Wookiee slave Gyyghrard remains something of a legend among those who work the mines of Kessel, an angry Kashyyyk native who stood up to and ultimately destroyed his oppressor. Gyyghrard's journal, kept safe by a fellow prisoner after the Wookiee's death, recently came to light during General Calrissian's failed attempt to reopen the mining operation. The journal offers a rare glimpse inside one of the Empire's most dreaded confinement facilities.

Planet: Kessel
Planet Type: Terrestrial/Barren
Climate: Cold and dry with thin atmosphere
Terrain: Alkali flats and barren, rocky mountains
Atmosphere: Breathable with gas mask
Gravity: 0.82 standard
Diameter: 6,632 - 7,980 km (nonspherical)
Length of Day: 26 standard hours
Length of Year: 322 local days
Sentient Species: Human, many alien species
Languages: Basic
Population: 700 (military and administrative), 10,400 (prisoners)
Species Mix: 22% Human, 78% Other
Government: Military Administration
Major Exports: Glitterstim spice
Major Imports: Foodstuffs
System/Star: Kessa

Planets	Type	Moons
Senna	molten rock	0
Kessel	Terrestrial/Barren	1
Kareda	iceball	0

Sector: Outer Rim

Day 1: Arrival on Kessel

My name is Gyyghrard the Wookiee, and the last few weeks have been the worst days of my 50 years. I must take solace in the fact that my newfound enslavement will delay, maybe even prevent, the indenture or execution of my family. Though a prisoner, I remain a Wookiee, and will serve my term with as much honor as I can muster.

Acquiring these ragged sheets of flimsi and a simple writing stylus proved easier than I had thought. Despite the despicable conditions here in the Spice Mines of Kessel, there is a thriving black market trade amongst the prisoners for illicit items. Anything from clerical supplies to weapons can be obtained -- for the right price. The little Sullustan who supplied me with the material for this journal has agreed to keep me stocked in exchange for protection from other prisoners. In this place, my strength and ferocity are my most marketable commodity. I hope that I have found a friend.

But I'm wasting flimsi. I mean this to be a record of my incarceration on Kessel, so that I will one day have evidence to protect myself -- or at least get word to the outside of the system that operates here.

I arrived on Kessel on board a slave ship. As bad as the passage was -- with filthy accommodations, stale rations, and an outbreak of Dantari flu that killed three Humans and a Duro -- Kessel itself was a whole new kind of hell. The ship docked at the garrison moon, where the survivors of the trip were processed by a clerical officer and sent to "decontamination." The decontamination process consisted of blasting the prisoners with mysterious gasses of varying temperatures, from scalding hot to ice cold. Shaken and dazed, we were then led onto a cargo shuttle for a brief flight down to the factory prisons that sat above the mines. This was the last time I saw the stars, and my vision was so hazy that space all around us was distorted. My Sullustan friend insisted this was due to the gravitational disturbance smugglers called the Maw, but I couldn't say for sure. On Kashyyyk, I was a hunter, not a space pirate.

The guards, as one might expect, excel in the casual brutality common to stormtroopers and relish their thuggishness. We are kept in dismal, dimly lit barracks, where we are allowed to sleep a few hours at a time before returning to the mines. The air here is very thin, blasted out by massive atmosphere generators. Even in the mines, we must wear gas masks at all times lest we pass out. To ensure that no one gets any funny ideas about hoarding oxygenation equipment, we get only one mask when incarcerated and one recharge on the oxygen cell per day. The stuff we're mining, glitterstim -- insanely valuable on the black market, or so I've heard -- is ruined when exposed to light of any kind, so we must also work in total darkness. There's also something in the mines, some sort of deadly creature my Sullustan friend has told me to "keep a lookout for." I assume he was joking (though maybe not; his kind thrive in tunnels, he claims), but I have noticed a strange scent in the areas where this so-called "spice spider" has been spotted. If ever I detect that scent in great amounts, I must be ready to fight.



The guard is coming, so I must hide my journal for now. More later.

Part 2: In the Land of the Blind

Catalogued by Archivist Cory Herndon

ARCHIVIST'S NOTE: The fragmented journal of Gyyllghard the Wookiee indicates that he was not able to restrain his natural tendencies for long once the reality of his confinement -- and the tiny chance of any escape, ever -- began to wear on the proud creature. Gyyllghard made the following entry several days after lashing out at another prisoner, a brutal trustee guard. The Wookiee made such an impression on the trustees that they brought him before the most powerful of their kind in the prison, the Rybet who would one day seize control of the facility: Moruth Doole.

Day 73

It has been a long time since I dared take my hidden writing materials out for use. I believe I have been here for 73 days, but in truth this is only a guess. The days, such as they are, are longer here, and I am not certain our sleep periods are anything close to regular. I have spent the last few days -- perhaps even a week -- in solitary confinement.

It began during the meal break. We get only one, roughly halfway through the workday (our second meal -- if you can call what we're given a "meal" -- is taken at the top of the sleep period). A brutal trustee guard, a one-eyed Barabel, had decided to make a disciplinary example of my Sullustan friend. I had no honorable choice but to stand up for my friend. I hear the Barabel is still in the infirmary and planning to take revenge on me.

After the incident, trustee guards dragged me before Moruth Doole to learn my fate. I may have had an easier time of it facing a squad of stormtroopers. Doole is the most powerful trustee in the Kessel mines, a conniving Rybet who has, it's said, enough dirt on everyone in the prison, even the Imperials, to bring down the whole operation. He's used his information to deftly avoid the executioner's blaster and has been given free reign to enforce discipline when the slaves quarrel. Hired muscle and pitiable hangers-on surround him. Rumor has it the amphibian keeps a private swimming pool somewhere down here.

Doole had me beaten in the meal area. I am proud to say it took two more Barabels, a Trandoshan, and three utterly dishonorable Wookiees that actually fought with their claws extended to keep me down. Without bothering to see if I'd suffered any internal injuries (and laughing in my face when I pointed out that my arm was certainly broken in at least three places) Doole had his thugs take me to the Pit, where I was left, I think, for one week. The name is something of a misnomer; it's not a pit so much as an abandoned tunnel offshoot not far from the slave quarters. Doole had it converted to a solitary confinement cell with a durasteel door. The Rybet claims only he has the key. Though the pain made me black out, I managed to leave my ruined arm alone. I had no food and only meager water. Inactivity helped to conserve oxygen; I had to ration my breather equipment.



Moruth Doole

Once out, I was sent straight back to the mines. My Sullustan friend is gone, and my fellow prisoners are either too stupid or too fearful of Doole to tell me what happened to him. I've decided to bide my time. Killing Doole would do little good, since another would replace him soon enough. But if I can gain his trust, and then that of the Imperials, I may be able to get into a position to do some real damage.

Moruth Doole: Male Rybet Diplomat 4/Thug 2; Init +0 (Dex); Def 13 (+2 class,+1 size); Spd 6 m, swim 6 m; VP/WP -/12; Attack +3 melee (1d3-1, punch) or +5 ranged (3d4, holdout blaster); SQ Amphibious; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +5; SZ S; FP 0; DSP 11; Rep +1; Str 8, Dex 13, Con 9, Int 17, Wis 12, Cha 16; Challenge Code C.

Equipment: 2d4 bodyguards (3rd-level Thugs, any species), holdout blaster, Trustee's uniform, stolen Imperial code cylinders.

Skills: Appraise +10, Bluff +15, Computer Use +10, Diplomacy +12, Gather Information +16, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (Spice Mines of Kessel) +12, Read/Write Basic, Read/Write Rybese, Sense Motive +8, Speak Basic, Speak Rybese, Speak Huttese, Speak Ryl, Speak Barabel, Swim +4.

Feats: Persuasive, Skill Emphasis (Bluff), Skill Emphasis (Gather Information), Skill Emphasis (Intimidate), Toughness, Trustworthy, Weapon Group Proficiencies (blaster pistols, simple weapons).

Special Qualities: Amphibious -- Rybets can breathe both water and air normally, and they gain a +4 species bonus on Swim checks.

Part 3: Hope in Darkness

Catalogued by Archivist Cory Herndon

At the end of his first year, the rebellious Wookiee prisoner Gyyghard had made many enemies, but also some friends, in the mines of Kessel. The following entry describes how Gyyghard helped a group of doomed slave children celebrate one of Kashyyyk's most important holidays.

Day 404: Life Day Eve

By the wroshyr, there are *children* here. I had seen none and assumed that this was the case throughout the mines. I was incorrect. They arrive in groups and don't last long.

The Imperials force the young ones into work gangs of the same species, bound together with long chains. The trustee supply master issues digging tools, and the overseers send them into the smallest holes to find well-hidden spice deposits.

Doole thinks I've learned my lesson, I guess, and of late the trustee guards have gone easy on my lame arm. In what I first mistook for a compassionate act, Doole ordered me to take two hours of my scheduled workday to "baby-sit." I was given a pack of medkits and allowed to treat the child work gangs as best I could in pitch-blackness.

One gang of Wookiee children claim one week from today is Life Day. They could not come to grips with a year without this most sacred of Wookiee holidays, the one day that all of Kashyyyk falls into quiet communion with the trees of our homeworld and celebrates the gift of existence. Wookiees born of the homeworld only miss the day in the worst of circumstances, and these kids had only been off of Kashyyyk for two months. The children had come to a simple solution to the Life Day quandary -- in the absence of the forests, they would establish a communion with the other child prisoners. They wanted their holiday, and they meant to have it.

How can I do anything but help them?



Kashyyyk, the Wookiee homeworld

Day 411: Life Day

I earned another trip to the infirmary. Leg this time, lost it but got a low-grade bionic replacement.

On last night's late mine shift, the children used "Big Gyy!" -- that is, me -- as an intermediary so the work gangs could organize their secret celebration. We had all agreed that the safest and most logical time would be the mid-day meal break, when prisoners went in shifts to eat food wafers in the dim blue light of the meal hall. In another act I mistook for Doole's compassion, all the children and I had recently been assigned to the same meal shift.

With the help of a Jawa trustee who oversaw food storage, I found certain supplies.

The quiet celebration began as soon as we slaves had settled in to eat; within each ration packet was a rehydrated Corellian ryshcate cake. Not exactly traditional Wookiee cuisine, but I only had the slave's food stores to work with. And tucked beneath each piece of sweetbread was a small candle and a simple, one-use sparkstick.

The kids devoured their cakes in short order, and I heard the lead female of the Wookiee gang softly growl the melody to the traditional hymn "Tree of Life." Soon the hall was filled with small voices raised together. At the end of the song, the children would ignite their candles and let them burn for a single minute. Any longer, and the guards were bound to overreact. As it turned out, the guards overreacted ahead of schedule.

We had just begun the second iteration of the chorus. On the word "dream," hundreds of sparksticks snapped in unison, and hundreds of chains clanked to the floor. The children had overloaded their electronic shackles with the tiny incendiary devices.

In unison, the young slaves went berserk. The rest of us joined in after a few seconds. I saw Doole bolt into a waste chute but didn't have time to go after him -- the mess hall's complement of ten stormtroopers had leveled their blasters at the kids. I howled in warning, but a trustee brought me down with a flying tackle. On a barked order, the stormtroopers pulled their triggers.

The blasters were silent -- drained of power. The children roared and rushed the trustees and stormtroopers. The numbers were in their favor, and many of us adult prisoners joined in. The mob of young prisoners fought all the way to the launch bay before stormtroopers finally brought them down in a hail of recharged blaster fire. Not stunned -- the Warden had ordered the stormtroopers to shoot to kill.

At least, that's what Doole told me after I'd come to. I'd taken a stun baton to the head. No record of my role in the events of that day remains except this one. But I will not forget that day, or the Empire's role in it. Doole swears he feels the same way. We'll see. For now, I've got to get along with the toad.

I'm a prisoner with two bad limbs who's been starved for weeks. But I know one thing. The Warden's going to pay for the Life Day massacre.

Part 4: On the Moon

Catalogued by Archivist Cory Herndon

Gyylghrard the Wookiee suffered the loss of a leg and other permanent injuries in the Life Day riots. Records are unclear whether the young rioters really did escape, but the one they called "Big Gyy!" chose to believe they did. The belief kept him going for another few years, during which he played the model prisoner. Fortunately for history, he continued to keep a secret record of his true plans.

Day 892: Custodial Custody

Moruth Doole smiled as he approached me in the mess hall today. He's gotten fatter in the last few years. I hear he's gotten more involved in the spice trade; some say the Empire's not even running that end of things anymore. He rarely smiles, and it's never a good sign.

I was changing a bad hydrosprocket in my artificial knee -- I'd helped one of the medlab trustees move a deathstick cache during an Imperial inspection, and he'd helped me get some spare parts for my slapdash metal leg -- and didn't look up again at Doole even as I saw his small, round shadow loom over me. I managed to get the hydrossocket into place before one of Doole's Barabels knocked me to the ground with a backhand slap.

"Big Gyy!" Doole said in what I'm sure he thought was a charming manner. A drop of Rybet-drool struck my good forearm as I struggled back to my feet. I steadily met his eye.

"What is it, Doole?"

"You're hurting production, my gimpy friend," Doole continued through his gas mask. "Report to the launch bay, you're due on the next shuttle up to the garrison moon. Congratulations. You've drawn janitorial duty. Big Gyy!, consider yourself a trustee."

He said that last bit loudly enough for everyone in the mess hall to hear. Dozens of eyes bored into me with suspicion and envy.

Still, whether Doole meant to or not, he's done me a great favor. I must be sure to hide my writing materials in my new trustee's jumpsuit before the shuttle leaves.

Day 896: Janitor for the Empire

Anything is less dangerous and soul-breaking than spice mining on Kessel, though nothing is more degrading than working as a menial servant at Kessel's garrison moon. But, at least, one occasionally can see the distorted starfield.

The trustee work gangs take random shifts scattered around the Kessel Correctional Facility (why the garrison goes by this name when the actual prison is on the world below is beyond me, but it no doubt makes sense to an Imperial bureaucrat somewhere). This, I'm told, is to keep any of us from getting too familiar or comfortable in any one section of the garrison base. They haven't taken my Wookiee sense of smell into account, however. In the last few days, I've made a mental map of the structure.

From the shuttle approach, I did spot two *Victory*-class destroyers in orbit, but very little of the garrison was visible. Most of it is built into the rocky moon itself. The large docking bay and a powerful comm tower are the only major landmarks visible on the surface. Between two and four large transport shuttles are on the main flight deck at any given time, loading and unloading supplies, slaves, and other materials. I have also seen many smaller craft -- fast, blast-scored models that could only have been spice smugglers. The Imperials apparently feel no need to hide their own complicity in this lawlessness.

The docking bay, processing center, and temporary slave pens take up the station's four upper levels. Five levels down is the "brain" of the operation, the command deck. The Warden, one Commander Dewt Kluskine, was on duty yesterday morning when I was assigned to clean this area, the first time I'd gotten a good look at the man



A Barabel

who'd ordered the deaths of hundreds of slave children. The command center walls display constantly updated camera views of the mines, including infrared views from within the tunnels themselves. They could see our every move, even in the dark. I also noted a lone lift tube entrance not far from the Warden's command chair, smaller than the tube personnel normally used to move around the facility.

Kluskine made a point of kicking my metal leg out from under me as I moved around his station, which amused him to no end. I kept my mouth shut.

Below the command center are two floors of officer's quarters, another two floors of troop barracks, and the cramped trustee level. I still get only a few hours of sleep a night. But there's enough air to breathe, and I have the twisted stars.

Part 5: The Warden

Catalogued by Archivist Cory Herndon

This week, the fifth excerpt from the secret journal of the Wookiee Gyyllghrard, prisoner of the spice mines of Kessel.

Day 947: Some Justice?

I have been working as a trustee in the Kessel Correctional Facility on the garrison moon for a few months now, and my docile behavior and surprising efficiency (considering my artificial leg and lame arm) have been enough to earn me another tour on the custodial crew. Today, however, I received a surprise -- a promotion. I was to be on the honor guard of Warden Commander Dewt Kluskine.

I could not believe my luck. I've been looking for a chance like this for weeks. This bizarre development, I soon learned, is not as strange as it sounds. As the Warden of the prisoners that toiled in the mines, Kluskine also oversaw the illegal spice trade, or so he thought. I knew that, in truth, chief trustee Moruth Doole controlled the bulk of the trade but cleverly cooked the books to keep Kluskine fooled. Whatever the case, this meant Kluskine often received powerful underworld figures on the surface of Kessel -- crime lords who wished to see the facilities first hand, black market bureaucrats on hospitality tours of the factory prisons, and worse.

The Warden believed he looked more imposing with a bodyguard that included "dangerous-looking aliens" for such occasions, in case his visitors had less-than-noble (relatively speaking) intentions. So I joined a complement of six prisoner-guardians; myself, two of Doole's own Barabel thugs, an Aqualish with a wicked-looking metal arm, a savage-looking Chistori lizardman, and the biggest Ithorian I'd ever seen. We were outfitted with ceremonial poleaxes (vibroaxes with the power cells removed) and cast-off Gamorrean battle armor that still reeked of porcine sweat. That afternoon, instead of returning to our janitorial duties, the six of us joined a squad of stormtroopers, two lieutenants, and the Warden himself in a shuttle down to the surface.

Kluskine was bold, I'll give him that, even if he made every effort to ensure that his "honor guard" were suitably trustworthy. As we waited for the visiting Twi'lek crime lord in the "reception hall" that had been built secretly off the main launch bay on the planet, two dozen stormtroopers watched both the door and the Warden's slave guards. Still, a determined and suicidal prisoner could possibly get to the Imperial pig before the blasters cut him down. I began to form a plan.

I paid no attention to the discussion between the Twi'lek and the Warden, though my fellow honor guard and I were present the entire time. My mind was too busy swimming with possibilities. I had to find out when Kluskine was to hold his next reception and make sure I was assigned to the honor guard once more.

ARCHIVIST'S NOTE: This is the final entry in Gyyllghrard's journal, though we can fill in the rest of the story from eyewitness accounts. The crippled Wookiee was again called to serve on Kluskine's honor guard -- an appointment, it was later revealed, orchestrated by Moruth Doole -- during a visit from one of Jabba the Hutt's accountants. The administrator, a Toydarian named Fossco, described the event in his own memoirs:

"I entered the hall to see Kluskine once again surrounded by his 'honor guard.' Who did he think he was fooling, anyway? They smelled like Gamorreans. But if it made him feel better, fine, eh? But that day, I think, they did not make him feel better. One in particular, a Wookiee, made the Warden feel very bad, with an axe. I'd always complimented Kluskine by saying he wasn't one to lose his head in negotiations. Just goes to show you how wrong you can be. The stormtroopers took care of the Wookiee what removed his noggin, but I have to wonder -- who will the Empire convince to run this hellhole now?"

Dewt Kluskine: Human Male Noble 1/Soldier 4/Officer 4; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Def 17 (+6 class, +1 Dex); Spd 10 m; VP/WP 82/18; Atk +9/+4 melee (1d3 +2, punch) or +9/+4 melee (2d4 +2, vibrodagger) or +9/+4 melee (stun DC 15, stun baton) or +8/+3 ranged (3d6, blaster pistol); SQ Bonus class skill (Intimidate), favor +3 (+1 class, +2 Influence feat), leadership, requisition supplies; SV Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +8; SZ M; FP 2; DSP 22; Rep +7; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 18, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 10; Challenge Code D.

Equipment: Bodyguards, blaster pistol, encrypted comlink, illegal spice wealth, offices, personal shuttle, stun baton, vibrodagger.

Skills: Bluff +14, Computer Use +12, Diplomacy +12, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (Spice Mines of Kessel) +11,

Knowledge (Imperial bureaucracy) +8, Profession (administrator) +16, Read/Write Basic, Speak Basic, Speak Trandoshan, Speak Hutttese, Speak Ryl, Speak Rybese.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Far Shot, Infamy, Influence, Persuasive, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Skill Emphasis (Knowledge [Spice Mines of Kessel]), Skill Emphasis (Profession [administrator]), Skill Emphasis (Intimidate), Weapons Group Proficiencies (blaster rifles, blaster pistols, heavy weapons, simple weapons, vibro weapons).

The Spice Mines of Kessel

Mentioned very early in *Star Wars* history when Han Solo boasts of making the Kessel Run and C-3PO frets about being sent to the planet's horrible Spice Mines, the shattered world of Kessel was brought to life in the Jedi Academy trilogy. Han Solo met and befriended future Jedi (and world-killer) Kyp Durrón when the famous smuggler found himself imprisoned in the darkened bowels of the mine world. By this point in the timeline, Moruth Doole, a former high-ranking prisoner, had seized control of the slave and mining facility. Note that this month's article is set during the Rebellion era, when the mines are under the Imperial rule of Warden Commander Kluskine, though Doole is already an important trustee.